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ABSTRACT

This article describes the development and implementation of the Ohio Valley Foreign Language and Literature Project, a regional effort at interinstitutional cooperation for articulation, teacher professional development, and improved public image for foreign language instruction in one section of Ohio. The program was originated by Ohio University, was funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, and involved secondary and postsecondary foreign language teachers and administrators. Geographic and professional isolation, pinpointed as an important issue for the participants, was reduced by rotating meeting sites, and this approach also had the effect of increasing language program visibility in the communities. Projected emphases for the second year and beyond include teacher travel and professional development in the form of an international teacher workshop and a college internship program for high school teachers, obtaining space and funds for a professional library, exploring issues and attitudes concerning the compatibility of language and literature studies, and encouraging other collaborative group efforts. (MSE)

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TEACHERS HELPING TEACHERS: A FOREIGN LANGUAGE COLLABORATIVE IN SOUTHEAST OHIO

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In the Fall of 1982 the University of Pennsylvania invited institutions teaching foreign languages and literatures to apply for participation in the project "Strengthening the Humanities through Foreign Language and Literature Studies." This project, under the direction of Dr. Claire Gaudiani, was funded in part with a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. A primary goal of the project was to develop a collaboration among foreign language teachers at all levels of instruction that would foster improved articulation among programs, enhance professional development opportunities, and increase community awareness of the value and contributions of foreign language studies. As a condition of the grant, the proposal had to originate at a post-secondary institution, but secondary teachers were to be included from the start as an integral part of the steering committee submitting the application.

Ohio University is a residential, state-supported university with an enrollment of some 14,000 students; it is located in Athens, a small town in a relatively remote area of the state. The Department of Modern Languages at Ohio University, with 22 faculty in 5 languages, has a long tradition of outreach activities, most notably the annual language fair and language camp for high school students, both established in 1974. The language fair, which is attended by about 1000 high school students, teachers, and parents, has been a cooperative effort in which the department has tried to respond to high school needs and wishes while providing the facilities and opportunity for students to exhibit their language skills and projects. Despite this tradition and other efforts, such as an occasional workshop, the faculty felt that more could be done for language teachers and programs in the area. Thus when Claire Gaudiani's project was announced, the department saw it as an opportunity to increase its efforts at promoting language studies while at the same time drawing attention to these efforts by becoming part of a national project. It was assumed that more prestige and weight would be attached to university activities through the addition of the prefix NEH; this has proven to be the case and has gained for the department financial and moral support from the university administration as well as from high school principals and superintendents. The department is also very fortunate in having a university president (Charles Ping) who has expressed his strong support of international education and community outreach. Since the project encompasses both these goals, it was relatively easy to obtain letters of support from the provost and the dean.

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Because of previous close association with high school teachers (many of whom are Ohio University graduates), a basic mailing list (used to distribute the departmental alumni newsletter "Say There") was already available. A questionnaire was sent out to these alumni/alumnae and other regional foreign language teachers describing the Gaudiani project and asking what interest there was in participating. The overwhelmingly positive response from teachers encouraged the department faculty to form a steering committee and proceed with the application. Ohio University faculty on the committee included Lois Vines and Richard Danner in French, Maureen Weissenrieder in Spanish, Barry Thomas in German, and Charles Richardson, director of language labs; high schools were represented by Elsa Heffelfinger, an Athens High School Spanish teacher, and Barbara Reichenbach, a Nelsonville-York High School French and Spanish teacher. In the spring of 1983 we were one of about eighty centers established nationwide. The other Ohio center is at Cleveland State University.

The first general meeting of the Ohio Valley Foreign Language and Literature Project (as we later came to call ourselves) was held in September 1983. The turnout of over 30 area foreign language teachers from as far as 75 miles away exceeded our expectations, and initial reserve soon gave way to a lively discussion of a list of problem areas that had been identified by the national center as particularly critical for foreign language teachers and programs. The following items emerged from the discussion as being of greatest importance to us:

1 public/community awareness
2 work load
3 sharing ideas and materials
4 articulation
5 student motivation
6 testing (placement and proficiency)
7 isolation

Of these, we felt that our group could be most effective in the areas of public awareness, articulation, sharing ideas and materials, and isolation.

Dealing with isolation

Teachers in our southeastern Ohio region experience isolation in both a geographic and a collegial sense, in that each school district has only one high school and with few exceptions each high school has only one foreign language teacher. Just by holding our meetings we have been able to give teachers the opportunity to discuss their common problems and challenges and to share ideas and materials that have proven to be successful. At each of our gatherings we have noticed an increasing degree of collegiality among the college and high school faculty and a growing sense that each individual is part of an effective group effort. Member responses to a recent questionnaire identified this chance to meet

with colleagues as the greatest benefit gained from our first year of activity.

The geographic aspect of isolation, that is, the distances that people must travel on poor roads to attend our meetings, remains a problem, although our turn-outs have been satisfactory (25-35). We have also felt it necessary to hold all-day meetings to justify the long trip. One solution to the distance question is to move the meeting site around our region, which encompasses a sixty-mile radius of Athens. The third meeting in February, 1984, was held on the Lancaster campus of Ohio University, and in the meantime several members of the group have volunteered their schools as possible sites for future meetings. We also look forward to the time when the interactive television hookup now available between the main Ohio University campus in Athens and the regional campus in Lancaster (45 miles away) will be expanded to include much of our area, thus allowing those at a greater distance to share in our activities.

This rotation of sites responds to a concern of the steering committee that Ohio University should not become or be perceived as the dominating force in the project. Given our size and resources, it is natural that the Modern Language Department will continue to provide much of the material and financial suppport for the project, but we feel it is essential that all members be involved in planning and carrying out the activities.

Rotating meeting sites also gives the project and the language programs higher visibility in local communities, which promotes our efforts at increasing public awareness and support (a second critical need identified by our members). By public we mean both the community and school administrations. Since high school language staffs are so often just one person, that individual may feel powerless to effect positive change or to prevent a weakening of language programs in the face of budget cuts made by voters and administrators. It is our hope that as the public becomes more aware of value of language studies for humanities education in general, community support will develop. In our group discussions, several successful local efforts in this direction have been shared and should eventually result in success elsewhere. Some examples of these efforts include the following:

1. Principals have committed funds for the acquisition of language materials; this has resulted in peer pressure being applied to other principals to follow.

2. International dinners were held for language students, their parents, and other members of the community; particularly in the more rural areas this seems to be an effective way of overcoming some of the resistance to experiencing and accepting "foreign" cultures.

3. A local high school foreign language teacher is using her senior honors students to introduce Spanish into the elementary school.
4. A French teacher, faced with resistance from male students to participating in a French dance group, recruited the star of the football team as her lead dancer; resistance crumbled, and the group won first prize at Ohio University's language fair that year.

Second-year Projects: Travel and Professional Development

Our second year began with a full-day meeting of 35 high school and college foreign language teachers. The morning session dealt with the question of study abroad tours with high school students, including how to convince administrators and school boards that the experience is worthwhile. Since a large number of our members had organized and participated in such trips, the discussion was lively and informative. A concrete result was the development of a list of tour groups with which members had had experience (good and bad) as well as a list of teachers in our region who could serve as reference sources for colleagues planning similar trips.

The afternoon session was devoted to professional development opportunities. This discussion revealed a strong desire on the part of foreign language teachers to engage in some kind of professional development, and not necessarily for academic credit. To our surprise, family responsibility was not as strong an inhibiting factor as we had assumed, although lengthy absences from spouse and children were not generally favored.

Two proposals to promote professional development are now being pursued: Skills and Knowledge Improvement in Language and Literature (SKILL), and a College Internship/Fellowship for High School Foreign Language Teachers.

To implement the SKILL proposal, Professor Lois Vines of the Department of Modern Languages at Ohio University is proposing to bring teachers of English in France to the United States to meet during an intensive weekend workshop with local teachers of French. The benefits will be two-fold: American French teachers will have an opportunity to increase their language, literature, and/or culture skills through close contact with native speakers, while the visitors--once the workshop is completed--will be able to increase their English language skills and knowledge of America. In order to keep costs down, the visitors will stay with a host family. Ideally, the program will involve a second collaborative group in another part of the country so that the visitors will experience some of the variety of American culture.

To participate in a college internship, high school foreign language teachers will obtain a leave of absence (up to one year)

from their present position in order to attend graduate classes at Ohio University and will provide teaching or other services to the university. The other services might include, for example, working with the methods teacher in training future language teachers or serving as an assistant to the director of language and computer labs to gain experience in new technologies and their applications in the classroom. Ideally, the fellowship will last an academic year and will culminate in a quarter abroad on one of Ohio University's study abroad programs. The benefits will include the following:

1. A change of working environment may allow the teacher to return to the high school program refreshed and invigorated.
2. The teacher will have an opportunity to gain some graduate credits toward an advanced degree, which in most cases has salary implications.
3. The quarter abroad will provide direct contact with the target culture and language, which might not otherwise be available at such relatively low cost.

The university will also benefit:

1. Experienced part-time teachers will be involved in the beginning, intermediate, and possibly third-year level language courses.
2. The experience will offer the university language faculty and their high school colleagues the opportunity to discuss on a continuing basis the problems of articulation between high school and university programs.
3. A further benefit will be the presence of mature graduate students in the masters' program.

Finally, the high school students will benefit from the teacher's increased language proficiency and awareness of current trends in the target culture. We are presently seeking sources of funding for both of these programs and hope to have the SKILL project in place by Summer 1986.

A third goal for the year is to obtain funding and space for a foreign language library and materials center. The Modern Language Department has a wealth of resources that could be of use to high school teachers and that the department would like to share in a more systematic way than is now possible. Efforts to make the materials more available are hampered by lack of accessible space, cataloguing deficiencies, lack of personnel to handle requests, and lack of money for postage. Because such service fits in well with Ohio University's commitment to community outreach, however, we are hopeful that some internal funding by the university may become available.

One problem area identified by our group as important was public awareness. We define <u>public</u> to mean anyone outside the

foreign language field, including, in particular, school administrators. In April 1984, a four-day conference of representatives from twenty collaboratives was held in Cincinnati to review and discuss the first year's activities; each group had to include one high school and one college administrator outside the field of foreign languages. As the meeting progressed, it was clear that our group's two administrators (one a high school curriculum coordinator, the other a professor of Physics and associate dean of Arts and Sciences) were impressed by the seriousness and professionalism of the conference participants, and they came away with a deeper appreciation for the contributions, needs, and challenges of our field.

Encouraged by this development, we decided to invite to our December meeting regional superintendents, principals, and guidance counselors to discuss matters that we felt would be of interest to them: university entrance and exit requirements around the state; the new state college admission standards for high school graduates; how high school counselors and programs might anticipate some of the problems faced by university freshmen; and the value of foreign language study for careers in a variety of fields.

Since we were apprehensive about how eager public school administrators might be to attend an evening meeting dealing with foreign language study, especially in the December pre-Christmas rush, we approached Ohio University's dean of Arts and Sciences for funding for a meal preceding the meeting. As on several occasions in the past, support was immediately forthcoming. The cash bar and dinner no doubt contributed to our largest turnout of foreign language teachers (40) and administrators (20), and the opportunity to socialize before the business portion of the meeting was stimulating and beneficial. Both the brief formal presentations (about forty minutes) and the subsequent discussion period proved to be enlightening to all the participants and confirmed our assumption that secondary and higher education faculty and administrators have many concerns in common even though they may be expressed in a variety of ways. We feel that this effort at including non-foreign language colleagues in our discussions was highly successful, and we will continue to keep them involved in our project. We hope that through such contacts administrators will become more informed about our efforts and will gain a better understanding of the work of their foreign language faculty. They should also develop a deeper appreciation of the place of foreign language studies in the basic humanities curriculum as well as of their value for a wide variety of careers not commonly associated with language use.

One topic we wish to pursue in future meetings is the dual thrust of the original project title, which speaks of both language and literature studies. Informal conversations at our meetings have shown that these two aspects of foreign language studies

are often viewed as incompatible or at best tangentially related. By devoting some time to the topic, both high school and college faculty may achieve a better sense of what is meant by the study of language and literature. Such discussions will help us define our goals more clearly, will offer our students a more integrated program of language, literature, and culture, and will thus contribute to an improved articulation of foreign language programs at all levels.

A long-term and continuing goal is to encourage the creation of similar collaborative groups within our region and around the state. Already some of our members are meeting in smaller interest groups to maintain contact on a more frequent basis than the schedule of general meetings allows, and we have provided information to foreign language faculty at another state university interested in forming a collaborative group in their region. Recently, the original name of the national project was changed to "Academic Alliances: School/College Faculty Collaboratives" in order to reflect more accurately the broader scope of the project, namely to encourage similar collaborations among high school and college faculty in other disciplines (1). To promote this goal we will be in touch with colleagues in other fields in order to develop interest and to provide whatever support we can (2).

Since the effort at collegial collaboration across the levels of educational institutions is meant to be a continuing one, this report offers no specific conclusions. Some of our most pressing needs have been met, others remain to be dealt with. Based on our experience of the past eighteen months, however, we can say with confidence that the effort has been worthwhile and beneficial to the vast majority of the participants, and we look forward to continued and increased benefits for the foreign language teachers, students, and programs in our region.

Notes

1 See the report by Claire Gaudiani, Clara Krug, and Debra Slaughter, "Academic Alliances: School/College Faculty Collaboratives," Foreign Language Annals 17 (December 1984), pp. 605-608.

2 Anyone wishing to explore the possibility of establishing a similar collaborative is invited to contact the author: Barry G. Thomas, Director, OVFLLP, Department of Modern Languages, Ohio University, Athens, Ohio 45701.

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